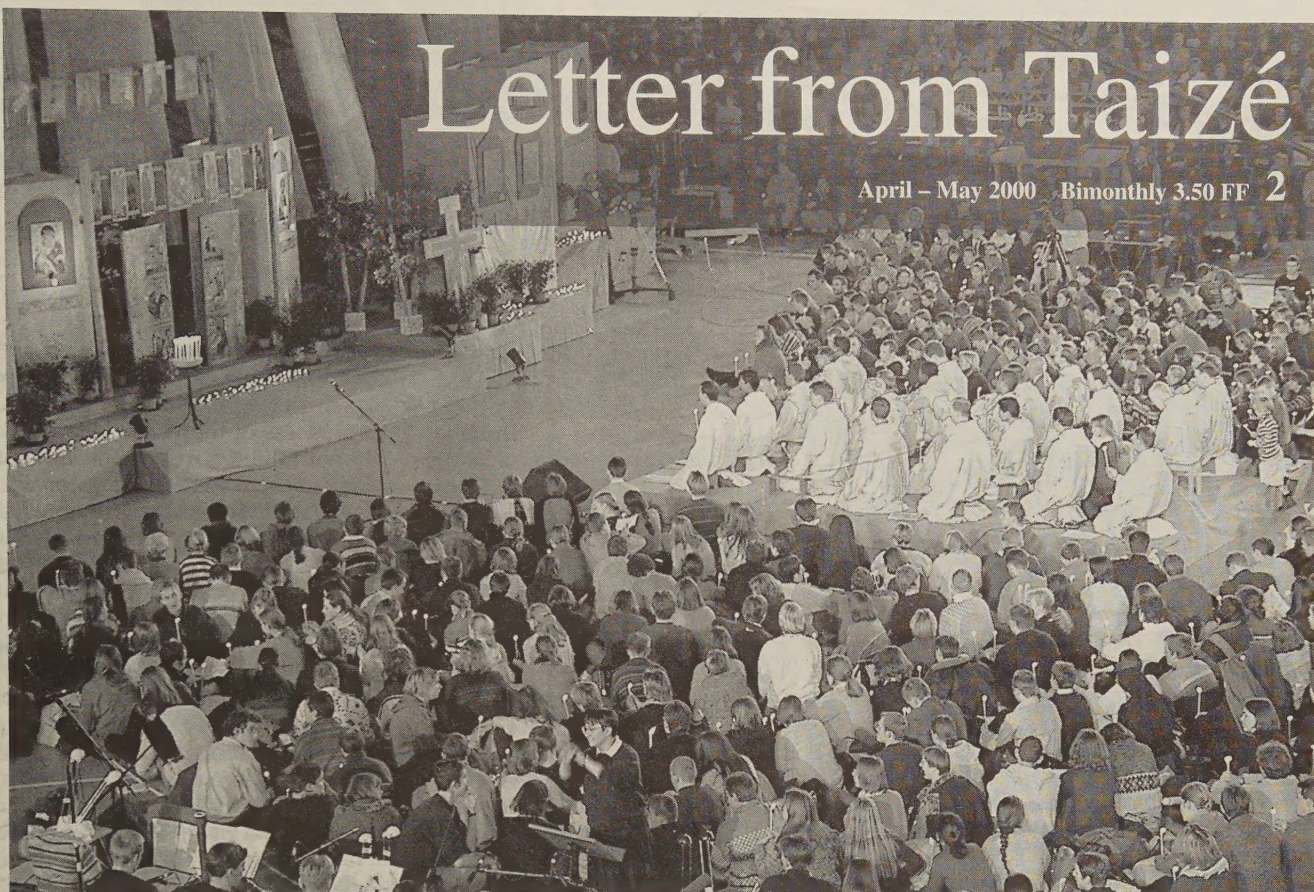


Letter from Taizé

April - May 2000 Bimonthly 3.50 FF 2



YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING AT WARSAW

Bearing a sign of hope

PROCESSED

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On the morning of 28th December, the special trains arrived at the Warsaw Central Station

one after another, releasing an uninterrupted flood of pilgrims who spread out into the town and its surroundings. The sun shone out cheerfully as they arrived to participate in the twenty-second young adult European meeting.

At last the day of the welcome had come for the thousands of young Poles who had been arranging accommodation in the eighty-four parishes of the region, for the tens of thousands of families who were waiting eagerly for their guests, and for those who had travelled night and day right across Europe. The Portuguese, for example, had spent three nights in their busses. After the last leg of their journey by train or by coach the young Europeans were welcomed in the parishes with cakes and a bowl of tea, as they learned the addresses of the families that would be offering them hospitality.

The hospitality of the families

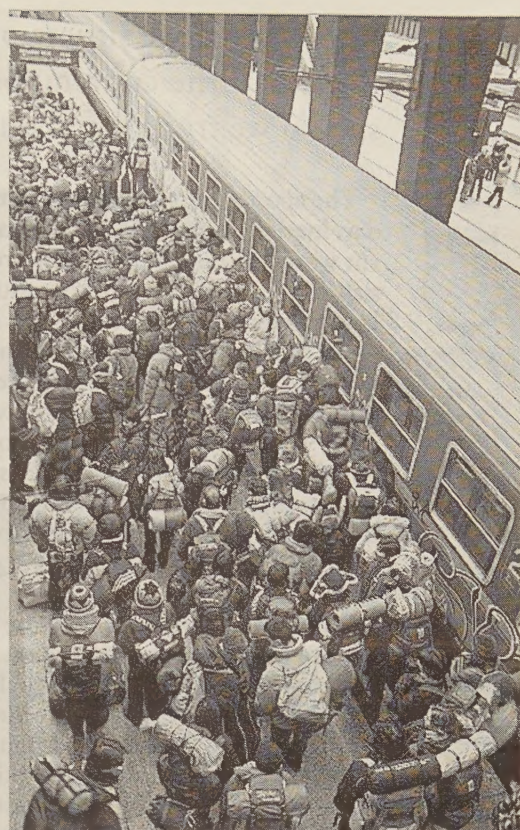
The quality of the welcome offered by the families was one of the strong points of the meeting. How could we sum up the thousands of things shared, discovered, wondered at, laughed at; all the efforts to communicate through signs, and also the silences, which often said more than easy words could do? More than in previous years, the families who offered a welcome came with the young people to the morning prayers in the parishes and also to the

places of common prayer at midday and in the evening.

In the morning in the parishes, a special accent was placed on sharing with witnesses to commitments in the locality, and also on meeting people who could explain the recent history of Poland or the rebuilding of Warsaw after the Second World War.

The Common Prayer

At midday and in the evening, the common prayers took place in a sports hall and in four heated tents put up for



two choirs, who, one afternoon in the Orthodox cathedral of Warsaw, communicated something of the treasure of their tradition by singing. Natasha, from Moscow, wrote: "For me, for the young people from Russia, it was important to be there. After the years of the cold war, to become aware of the spirit of reconciliation takes on a whole new meaning. I remember from my childhood how difficult relationships with the Polish used to be, since they were under a lot of pressure from Russia. It isn't easy to change everything in ten years, but I feel that there is a sense of urgency, for the young generation, in the desire to re-establish a communion. For me, coming here has been a sign of hope."

At Warsaw after the meeting.

A girl who helped lead preparations in her parish summed up her experience: "It is difficult, after the meeting, to describe the unrepeatable atmosphere which we experienced. I think it probably stems from the climate of authentic

and sincere prayer as well as the great openness and kindness of people. As we saw what an effect other people's trust had on us, we became better able to grasp how important it is for us to be open and to 'radiate kindness'. It is something which can open people's hearts, in such a way that impossible things become possible. We found that our faith, enthusiasm, and commitment can help others to go forward more than we suppose.

We grasped that God doesn't call us to be passive, but to stay in communion with him and to go towards others. God calls us to create what is good in a

down-to-earth way, even if it seems to us something very simple, very small, like a drop of water.

The generosity of the families took us by surprise. At first we were worried and asked ourselves how we were going to welcome two hundred and fifty people in our parish. For example, we started looking for financial resources so as to welcome them 'properly'. We even wanted to take a collection to buy cakes for the 'festival of nations'. Then we realized that we could welcome people very well with simple means, with open hearts, with hospitality, with kindness. And the cakes arrived, more than we > 7

Message of Welcome from the Prime Minister of Poland, Mr. Jerzy Buzek:

"The Polish soul is marked above all by simplicity; it is without spiritual pretension. Blessed are you because — like so many others before you — you are a leaven of trust, of peace, and of reconciliation in the heart of Europe. This is how Europe will be built up." These words were spoken by Brother Roger, founder of the Taizé Community, to the Polish participants in the European Meeting at Paris in 1994. A beautiful message, but one which reminds us of the responsibility involved in building up a Christian Europe together....

First of all we must find God in our own hearts, stop for a moment, be still and contemplate him, in order to hear him in silence and attentiveness. When we open ourselves to God in prayer, we experience his presence, we discover the power of love and of faith. Meetings of young people

like this one are just such times when we can be still.... It does not much matter who has come, from which country, or what their religious affiliation may be. I am in total agreement with the idea at Taizé that ecumenism is not something to be talked about, but quite simply to be lived....

I am overjoyed to see so many young people from Poland taking part in this pilgrimage of trust on earth, and all the more so because our future depends on the young generation, on its strength, on its perseverance in faith and on its openness to others....

For us Poles, it is a great honour to be welcoming the European Meeting to Warsaw at the beginning of the new millennium. It is our hope that the presence of young people from the whole world many enrich us, give us life, and rejuvenate us inwardly, so as to prepare us better to live out fully the Jubilee year. I want to finish by quoting Brother Roger one again: "What will captivate us in the year 2000 is the continuity of Christ in the ongoing history of the human family".

How should we situate ourselves with respect to the contemporary world; should we try to stand out or to adapt?

The apostle Paul advised the Christians who, in his day, lived in Rome, "Do not be conformed to the present world" (Romans 12,2). And reflecting on Christian life in the light of the exodus of the people of Israel, Peter said in his turn, "Do not conform yourselves to the desires you had when you lived in ignorance" (1 Peter 1,14). In Egypt, the Israelites were "ignorant" because they did not know that there was any other way to live but in slavery. In the same way, before discovering Christ, Christians did not know that they were free not to imitate the behaviour of others. It was faith that made it possible for them to leave behind their "Egypt," in other words conformity to society's norms.

Christians, however, unlike the people of the exodus, do not live in the wilderness, but at the heart of the manifold situations of human life. In the apostles' day, for example, Christian women sometimes lived with husbands who were without faith, and slaves who had become believers kept taking care of the business of their non-Christian masters (1 Peter 2,18—3,6). But while still mingling with others, they did not always act like everybody else. Slaves were expected to be completely loyal. Christians were loyal, but at times they refused to take part in dishonest dealings or a murder ordered by their master. In these kinds of situations, they accepted to be slandered as disloyal, and sometimes they paid dearly for their refusal.

Today, too, the Gospel calls us to refuse to conform in certain ways. Solidarity with the weakest is in contrast to the principle of efficiency at all costs. Faithfulness in marriage goes against the stream. Whoever "loves foreigners as themselves" (Leviticus 19,34) may be criticized for a lack of solidarity with their own people. Exposed to irony and defamation, Christians can be tempted to withdraw into their own closed world.

Aware of this danger, the apostle Peter wrote, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 2,12). Peter counsels us to be sincerely concerned that others have a good impression of us, even those who distort our intentions. The purpose of our "good lives" is not first of all to please God or other Christians, but rather to do things so well than non-Christians will find them praiseworthy and in the end be appreciative. For the sake of the Gospel, Saint Paul wanted nothing less than "to please everyone in all things" (1 Corinthians 10,33).

Christ warned his disciples that they could not escape animosity, or even persecution (Matthew 5,10-12). But so that we do not use this as a pretext for being uninterested in those around us, he adds, "Your light should shine out, so that people may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in heaven" (5,16).

Does the Gospel promise us a better future?

Certainly many people set out to follow Jesus because they expected from him changes leading to a better future. They thought that he was the Messiah who would restore justice and peace to their land. The day Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, the crowd of disciples welcomed him with that hope (Mark 11,8-10). The events that followed were a rude awakening. Jesus knew that it was coming: "You will all fall away on account of me" (Matthew 26,31). His unjust and brutal execution put an end to some hopes. The great change did not come about. It was necessary to return to the sad reality.

Luke's Gospel tells us how, on the road to Emmaus, the Risen Christ walked alongside two of his dejected disciples. He did not try to reawaken their disappointed hopes. On the contrary, he explained to them that "the Messiah's glory" (24,26) was entirely different from what they had imagined. It is not a political change, but the presence of the Risen One who causes our hearts to "burn" (24,32). Christ went "to sit at the right hand of God." On earth, he has neither throne nor ministers to govern and to impose himself like a powerful ruler. "From now on our life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3,1-3). The Gospel does not promise progress, but a life supported by the presence of the Risen Christ.

And yet if Christ is alive, hope is alive too. "God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1,3). Our expectations can be disappointed, but our hope, which finds nourishment in Christ, can never die. The Easter mystery teaches us not to set our hopes on what we can imagine or predict. For the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the discovery of Christ's true glory required a painful re-evaluation of their ideas of a better future. But their desire to move forward came to life even more strongly, and they hurried to Jerusalem.

In the Bible, many believers expected positive changes here on earth. At the beginning of the Gospel, the Virgin Mary sang of her hope for greater justice (Luke 1,51-53), for she was part of that people to which God taught hope by means of concrete perspectives: liberation from bondage, a land where they could live in security, and later a Messiah and even universal peace. If the resurrection detaches our hope from every definable object, it does not weaken the longing for a better future. It is perhaps even the hidden cause of the constant rebirth of this longing. In the course of the last two thousand years, nothing has been able to prevent hope from being reawakened again and again, even in the most sombre periods. That is because, once and for all, Christ's resurrection has made the unexpected possible, opening "a door that no one can shut" (Revelation 3,8). Without always being aware of it, human beings began to realize that history did not go in circles but was heading in a definite direction.

- 1 Mon** 2 P 1, 5-8
Seek perseverance, true devotion, mutual kindness and love. If you live with these things, they will bring you to a real knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2 Tue** 1 Tm 1, 12-17
Paul writes: I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength. By calling me into his service he has considered me trustworthy.
- 3 Wed** Jn 14, 1-12
Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."
- 4 Thu** Mk 11, 22-25
Jesus said: When you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, as your Father in heaven forgives your sins.
- 5 Fri** 1 S 16, 1-13
The Lord said to Samuel: Take no notice of appearance. God does not see as human beings see: they look at appearances but God looks at the heart.
- 6 Sat** Rm 14, 13-19
St. Paul writes: The kingdom of God is not a question of exterior rules, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- 7 SUN** Lk 24, 35-48
The Risen Christ said to the apostles: This is what is written: The Christ will suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day. And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.
- 8 Mon** 2 Co 5, 18-21
Paul writes: In Christ, God has reconciled us to himself and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation.
- 9 Tue** Mk 6, 30-34
When Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them at length.
- 10 Wed** Pr 3, 3-5
Trust in God with all your heart and do not rely upon your own understanding.
- 11 Thu** Jr 2, 1-13
The Lord said of his people: They have forsaken me, the fount of living water, and have dug themselves cracked cisterns that will not hold water.
- 12 Fri** Mt 20, 20-28
Having called his disciples together, Jesus said: You know that in the world the powerful make their power felt. Among you this is not to happen. No, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant.
- 13 Sat** Rv 3, 7-8
Thus says the Lord: Though you are not very strong, you have kept my Word, and now I have opened before you a door that no one can close.
- 14 SUN** Jn 10, 11-18
Jesus said: I am the good shepherd. My sheep will listen to my voice and there will be one flock and one shepherd.
- 15 Mon** Sl 2, 1-11
If you want to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Be sincere of heart and steadfast. Do not be alarmed by adversity, but attach yourself to the Lord and do not leave him.
- 16 Tue** 1 Tm 6, 11-16
Paul writes to Timothy: Fight the good fight of faith and win the eternal life to which you were called.
- 17 Wed** Rm 12, 3-13
Paul writes: When you give, generously, from the heart; when you do works of mercy, do so with joy.
- 18 Thu** Mt 18, 1-4
Jesus said: Truly, I tell you, the one who becomes as little as a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
- 19 Fri** 1 Co 13, 8-13
Paul writes: These three things remain: Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of them is love.
- 20 Sat** Heb 10, 19-25
Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and in fullness of faith. Let us hold to the hope we profess, without wavering, for the one who has promised is faithful.
- 21 SUN** Jn 10, 11-18
Jesus said: I am the true vine. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.
- 22 Mon** Mt 5, 6-8
This is what the Lord wants of you, only this: to act justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.
- 23 Tue** 2 Tm 1, 5-8
Paul writes to Timothy: I remind you now to fan into a flame the gift God has placed in you. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of inward strength, of love and of self-control.
- 24 Wed** Dn 15, 7-11
Be open-handed towards your neighbour and towards the poor and needy in your land.
- 25 Thu** Lk 17, 11-19
To the Samaritan who returned to thank Jesus for healing him, Jesus said: Rise and go. Your faith has saved you.
- 26 Fri** 2 Co 5, 1-7
Paul writes: We advance by faith, not by sight.
- 27 Sat** 1 P 1, 22-25
Peter writes: Love one another deeply, from the heart.
- 28 SUN** Jn 15, 15-17
Jesus said to his disciples: I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know his master's business. I call you friends, because everything I have learnt from my Father I have made known to you.
- 29 Mon** Jn 1, 35-42
Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."
- 30 Tue** Sl 2, 1-11
You who revere the Lord, trust in him, await his good gifts: everlasting joy and mercy.
- 31 Wed** Jn 14, 18-21
Jesus said to his disciples: In a short time the world will no longer see me, but you will see that I live and you will also live.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

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4 SUN Jn 17,1-11 Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

5 Mon Ph 1,3-11 I am confident that the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the day of Christ Jesus comes.

6 Tue 1 P 3,8-17 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. Instead, repay with a blessing, for to this you were called.

7 Wed Ps 18 You are my lamp, Lord; you light up my darkness.

8 Thu Mk 4,1-9,13-20 Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, listen to the Word of God, accept it, and bear much fruit.

9 Fri Rv 21,5-7 God says: I am the Beginning and the End. I shall give water from the well of life freely to anyone who is thirsty.

10 Sat 1 Co 12,4-11 In each person the Holy Spirit manifests his action for the good of all.

1 Thu Mk 16,15-20 ASCENSION Jesus sent out his disciples, saying: Go out to the whole world; proclaim the gospel to all creation.

2 Fri Is 6,1-8 In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?" And he answered, "Here I am, send me."

3 Sat Mt 6,7-15 Jesus said: Some think that by using many words in their prayer, they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

11 SUN Jn 20,19-31 PENTECOST The Risen Christ breathed upon his disciples and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven.

12 Mon Lk 4,14-21 Jesus read out these words of Isaiah the prophet: The Spirit of the Lord is on me. God has sent me to announce good news to the afflicted, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.

13 Tue Is 66,18 The Lord says: I am coming to gather the people of every nation and language, and they will see my glory.

14 Wed Ep 4,1-7 With all humility, gentleness and patience, bear with one another in love. Take every care to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace.

15 Thu Jr 17,7-8 Blessed are they who put their trust in the Lord. Such a person is like a tree planted by the water: in a year of drought it is untroubled and never ceases to bear fruit.

16 Fri Sl 35,12-14,16-18 (35,14-22) God is utterly impartial. God never shows partiality to the detriment of the poor, but listens to the prayer of the one who is wronged.

17 Sat Zp 3,14-18a Your God is with you. God will quiet you with his love and dance with joy for you.

18 SUN Mt 28,16-20 Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time.

19 Mon Is 30,15 The Lord says: Your salvation is in returning and rest, your strength lies in calm and trust.

20 Tue 1 P 1,3-9 Though you have not seen Christ Jesus, you love him. Still without seeing him you believe in him and so are already filled with a joy so glorious it cannot be described.

21 Wed Jn 6,67-69 Seeing that many of his disciples were turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

22 Thu Mk 14,12-26 During the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus took bread, and when he had said the blessing he broke it and gave it to them, saying: Take this; this is my body.

23 Fri Ba 5,1-9 Leave behind your sadness and put on for ever the beauty of God's glory. For the Lord will guide you in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him.

24 Sat Ac 13,22-26 St JOHN THE BAPTIST John the Baptist prepared the coming of Jesus by proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the whole people.

25 SUN Mk 4,35-41 When Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, the disciples were overcome with awe and said: Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.

26 Mon Lk 6,36-38 Jesus said: Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged.

27 Tue Ep 4,17-32 Let yourselves be made new in the attitude of your minds and be clothed with the new self, which is created to be like God in justice and in holiness of the truth.

28 Wed Lk 22,24-27 Jesus said to his disciples: Who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet I am among you as one who serves.

29 Thu Mt 16,13-20 SS PETER AND PAUL Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by any human, but by my Father in heaven."

30 Fri Ep 3,14-19 May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, and may you be rooted and established in love, so that knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

By themselves, the disciples did not have the courage to go out and proclaim that the Kingdom of God was close at hand. But when they were sent out, then they dared to do it. And by sharing with others the life received from Jesus, they were able to understand it better.

They went out two by two, to support each other and to express a communion. By this sign, Jesus himself would be present. They discovered that God was already causing the realities of the Kingdom to grow in the world. But they were not exempt from difficulties, because they had to be close to people.

The urgent thing was to transmit peace, to communicate what is lacking in order to live a life of fullness. The disciples had to discern what was lacking in every situation. They could not be afraid of going toward people who were ill, of coming close to human misery. And when it did not seem possible to help anyone, their simple presence could express that they did not want hope to be extinguished.

Jesus asked them to "stay," to spend time with those who would welcome them. To know how to accept and sometimes to discern what others can give.

But then, all at once Jesus' words became more severe (v. 13-15). The disciples would experience rejection just as he did. He was not condemning the inhabitants of the cities he loved so much, but he could not hide his suffering at being rejected. With this little group of disciples, would he be able to announce the coming of God's Reign? These words allow us to see Jesus undergoing a real time of trial. And yet he renewed his total trust in his disciples (v.16). He would even "exult for joy through the Holy Spirit" (10,21), recognizing that the Father has set him and his disciples on this road.

- What concrete indications in this Bible text can inspire us as we try to communicate the Gospel to those who are near as well as to those who are far away?
- Have I had the experience that simply being present alongside someone who is suffering already brings them relief?
- How can we say "peace to this house" by other words? Through what acts?

Throughout the Bible, God reveals himself as the one who offers to make a "covenant," to watch over his people and to choose them as witnesses to his love and faithfulness. In this context, the "Law" is not an obligation. It is above all a gift which recalls the covenant and shows the people the limits they must not cross so that the covenant may be lived out to the full.

In the prophecy of Jeremiah, we sense God's deep joy that announces the renewal of his covenant, but in such a way that nothing can ever destroy it again. The sign of this covenant will no longer be outward; it will be an intimate presence in the depths of the heart. How can we not think of the confident words of Saint Paul, "I am sure that (...) nothing can separate us from the love of God manifested in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8,38-39)?

Fifty days after Passover, at the time when the people were celebrating the gift of the Law on Sinai, the apostles experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit, who "poured God's love into our hearts" (Romans 5,5). This presence promised by Jesus—"the Spirit of truth will bring you into the fullness of truth" (John 16,13)—fulfills the prophecy of Jeremiah. "All will know me, from the least to the greatest, because I will forgive..." (Jeremiah 31,34). Is not the Holy Spirit given to remind us, day after day, that forgiveness is always possible?

- What changes for me when I remember that God offers me a covenant relationship?
- What words of God are "written on my heart," set in the depths of my being?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

knew what to do with, brought spontaneously by the parishioners!

We discovered unexpected talents, in ourselves and in others. We were asked to look for 'Signs of Hope' — people who do something for others. And through this we have begun to look on our parish in an entirely new light. We didn't know that in our parish there are people who regularly visit the sick and lonely, that some visit in the hospital and in the nearby prison, that there is a children's home within the parish and that there are meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous groups.

We can already see some of the fruits of the meeting. Someone decided that they wanted to start visiting people who are ill and alone. We have a plan to organize a party for the children in the children's home. When we found the courage to address the people of the parish with enthusiasm, we saw how alive the Church is! Young people joined our preparation group, and with all the families who offered hospitality, we have come to understand that we can work together. In our parish, there will now be a regular prayer, as there will be for the whole city once a month.

We also discovered the Orthodox

Church. We saw the commitment of young people from Ukraine, Russia, Romania. We have got to know their Church better, a Church which is now reawakening after many years of persecution.

For us the most important thing was the witness of the families who offered hospitality. Some of them said that the young people they welcomed brought a lot of joy and happiness into their lives. Others said that the young people be-

came like their children and that they felt as though they were their parents. People who live in big cities are not always very communicative; they can be distant and sometimes critical of young people. But many became warm and full of understanding. Many said that they had changed their opinion of the young, that they were glad to have discovered a new face of youth, full of joy, of culture, of sensitivity."



Brazil

A "Day of Trust"

A "Day of Trust" took place in the town of Sao Jose de Rio Preto from 27 to 30 December, prepared by the Taizé brothers who live in Alagoinhas, Brazil. Twelve hundred young people from six Brazilian states took part. They all stayed with families in thirty-six parishes. About 3,000 people participated in the times of prayer together.

San Jose de Rio Preto is a modern city with half a million inhabitants, between Sao Paulo and Brasilia. The meeting came at the end of a year of preparation. Young volunteers visited all the parishes of the diocese, several Protestant churches, and almost all the dioceses of the state of Sao Paulo. The Sisters of Saint Andrew, an international Catholic congregation present in Taizé as well as in Alagoinhas, helped with the preparation. They have a school in San Jose de Rio Preto that is a centre of spiritual life, notably through the creation of "Christian Life Communities" based on Jesuit spirituality.

During the three days of the meeting, prayers were held in a large sports arena which was set up as a place of prayer. Icons placed in front of yellow fabric, dim lighting, songs and times of silence helped create an atmosphere conducive to calm and reflection.

After the meeting a young bishop, Orani Joao Tempesta, said, "This meeting will help different youth movements in the diocese to work together, and in general it will be a support for our ongoing life together." The pilgrimage of young people through the city towards a place of prayer, which lasted about an hour, attracted great notice from the residents, and was shown on local television.

Uganda

In a Refugee Camp

Jennifer is a social worker in a huge refugee camp in Uganda. She spent several weeks in Taizé during the summer of 1999. She describes her work:

Uganda is one of the rare countries in Africa that welcomes refugees; at least we have land to give them. The camp where I work is located in the middle of the forest. We furnish the refugees with tools to cut down trees and build their homes of wood and earth. We take care of medical assistance, schooling and also living costs for a year. And they begin to farm in order to be self-supporting when that year is over.

It is a real challenge for us. Often women arrive alone, either because they are widows or because their husbands

care only about their other wives. They have to manage all alone, for example by building a house. We try to help them. We visit everyone to find out who are most vulnerable.

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like to be in their situation. I know that now I am well, that my life is fine. When these people were back in their own country, the same thing was surely true for them. They had good jobs, homes, and all at once they lost everything. In the camp where I work we offer hospitality to over six thousand people from Congo, Rwanda and Sudan.

What is most surprising to me is the way the refugees struggle to keep a "normal" spiritual life. As soon as they have finished their homes, they build a church. Most of them maintain a spiritual life. In any case, they have not lost hope. When you go to their celebrations, you see them dance. The solidarity is incredible. Even with the local people. You can see Ugandans come to the camp for prayer or refugees go to meetings outside the camp, in the capital. The nearby churches, Protestant or Catholic, help them and bring them to see other places and pray with other people.

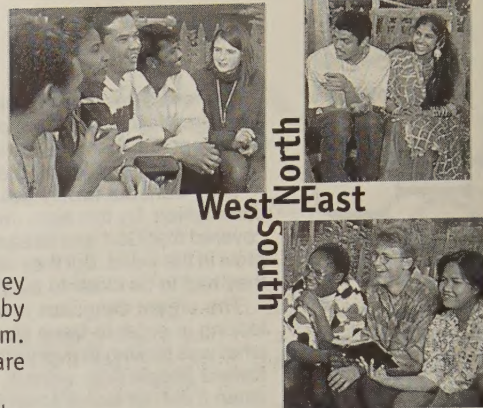
In the camp, we try to encourage the women particularly and to give them responsibilities. Some are beginning to stand out. When we organize elections, the women do not generally come to vote. They have to be encouraged, so we organize meetings for women and girls. "Come on, don't be shy. Look, I'm a woman too..." And we also have to tell the men, "Encourage your wives to come to the meetings. You know that all of us are important; we're all equal." To some extent, this campaign has been successful. A few months ago, we had elections in the camp, and I was astonished to see that everyone voted, including the women. The morning of the voting, they were even standing in front of the polling places before the men!

Mexico

A Youth Meeting for the Whole Country

Following the visit of Taizé brothers to several Mexican cities last year, the Bishop's Commission for Youth Ministry invited the Taizé Community to lead a youth meeting for the entire country.

The meeting will take place 18-21 May



2000 in the city of Queretaro, a two hours' drive north of Mexico City. This meeting is open to all the young people who wish to take part, but the Commission wants particularly to invite those in charge of youth ministry in all the dioceses of the country, as well as leaders of the different youth movements, and seminarians.

Just as during the European meetings, participants will be offered hospitality in dioceses and families. Each day there will be three times of prayer together, a time of Bible reflection around the Letter 2000 Astonished by Joy, and visits to meet with those who are working with the poor and in the local church.

Letter from Taizé

Annual subscription

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Correspondence:
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